



By: TA | AP Insight

Niger's junta survived an overthrow attempt with the help of Russia



Niger's junta survived its most severe **internal threat** since seizing power in a 2023 coup when renegade soldiers staged a mutiny over the weekend, triggering a 24-hour standoff that ended with Russian intervention.

The mostly young soldiers took some of their colleagues hostage at a strategic military base in the capital, Niamey, and fired shots near the presidential palace 12 kilometers (7 miles) away before being subdued by presidential guard forces aided by Russia's **Africa Corps** paramilitary group, according to several analysts and diplomats.

Russia's ambassador to Niger, Viktor Voropayev, told Russian media Niger had requested support from the Russian force and the mutineers were "neutralized, particularly thanks to the intervention" of Africa Corps. Nigerien authorities are yet to comment on the event.

Analysts say the clashes at the Base 101 at the Niamey international airport could have gone either way because of the mutineers' determination and large numbers until the Russian troops stepped in.

It's the second time this year the Africa Corps has intervened to fend off an attack on power centers in Africa's Sahel region.

In May, the Russian troops helped quell massive attacks by jihadis and rebels across **junta-led Mali**.

In a region known to be the global epicenter of terrorism, "fighting jihadis comes as a second priority (for the Africa Corps), but the first priority is to sustain regimes and they are succeeding in this," said Wassim Nasr, a senior research fellow at the Soufan Center, a New York-based think tank.

Russia uses forces to influence power in Africa

Across the Sahel region, a vast arid expanse south of the Sahara Desert, militaries that

grabbed power citing **security failures** have severed ties with longtime **Western security allies** and turned to Russia.

They first welcomed the Moscow-backed **Wagner** private mercenary group before it was replaced by Africa Corps under the direct command of the Russian Defense Ministry.

It is not known how many Russian mercenaries are in the Sahel's three junta-led countries of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, but varying estimates put the number between 1,700 and 2000.

Meanwhile, in the Central African Republic, Wagner is estimated to have around 1,000 forces.

The arrangement with Wagner and later Africa Corps has proven to be good business for Russia at a low cost - Wassim Nasr

As Russia competes with the United States, Europe and China for greater influence across Africa, the Russian forces have helped Moscow establish its hold in the countries on many fronts, from the economy to security and politics.

"The security arrangements that are currently in place, whether it's counterinsurgency support, military equipment, and other economic deals along the side, are heavily dependent on the leadership of these three countries," said Beverly Ochieng, a security analyst specializing in the Sahel for Control Risks consultancy.

Although Russia has limited resources to deploy in these countries, "they really know how to balance the diplomacy, counterinsurgency, and the sort of geopolitics to demonstrate that they're an all-weather friend," said Ochieng.

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Sahel faces a worsening security situation

While the Russian military partnerships have protected the juntas from security threats, everything else has worsened on the security front in the Sahel as armed groups increasingly **target cities** and urban centers in competing for influence and territories.

Niger's **Niamey airport** had been attacked twice by jihadis this year: in June by the al-Qaeda-linked JNIM jihadi group, killing 11 soldiers and two civilians, and in January by the Islamic State group's Sahel Province, which targeted expensive drones.



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Threats like this weekend's in Niamey could make the juntas prioritize their protection even more at the detriment of overall security.

Although the juntas have pushed for more sovereignty and launched campaigns presenting themselves as more independent, the events in Niger "highlight the vulnerabilities of a regime whose stability increasingly relies on a Russian partnership," writes the Senegal-based Timbuktu Institute for Peace Studies. "The intervention of an external partner to help contain an internal crisis raises a central question: how far can the pursuit of strategic autonomy go when it is accompanied by a growing dependence on Moscow?"

The success of Russia in keeping juntas in

power could also bolster Moscow's appeal for a number of African governments, said Nathaniel Powell, West Africa analyst at Oxford Analytica.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said recently the country is ready to offer its support to African countries in their fight against terrorism.

But countries are likely to be cautious about any partnership involving the Africa Corps, mainly because of its reputation for **human rights abuses**, analysts say.

Nonetheless, "having a foreign anti-coup force has advantages in that they have no local interests that could compete for their loyalty, and might be seen to be militarily superior to national military formations, thus deterring potential coup-makers," said Powell.